Missouri Department of Mental Health
Division of Alcohol and Drug Abuse

January 2012

Mark Stringer
Division Director

The Changing Trends of Heroin Addiction

Heroin addiction is a serious health condition that is characterized by severe withdrawal, persistent drug cravings, increased risk of respiratory failure and, in pregnant users, spontaneous abortion.[1] In Missouri, substance abuse treatment admissions for heroin addiction have been increasing in recent years with 2011 having the largest number of heroin-related admissions in the past 15 years. In 2011, over 4,000 Missourians were admitted to treatment for a heroin addiction problem.[2] Compared to 1997, heroin-related admissions in 2011 were more likely to be Caucasian. Injection use remains the preferred method of administration. Individuals with heroin addiction are also likely to be abusing other substances. Increasingly, this includes marijuana and other opiates such as Oxycontin. Cocaine use is less common in recent years. Most of Missouri's heroin-related admissions are from Eastern Missouri.

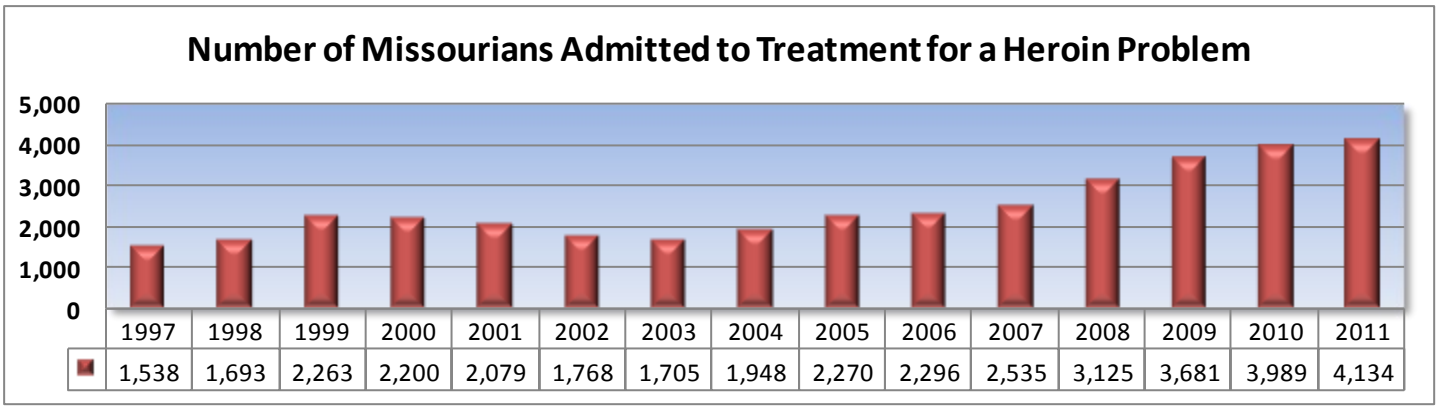

Figure: Individuals admitted to treatment with heroin listed as the primary, secondary, or tertiary drug problem.

% of Heroin Admissions that were	1997	2011	
Caucasian	49%	65%	↑
African-American	49%	33%	↓
Female	32%	41%	↑
Injection Drug Users	58%	64%	↑
Abusing Multiple Substances	80%	80%	
Also Abusing Other Opiates	5%	18%	↑
Also Abusing Cocaine	45%	24%	↓
Also Abusing Marijuana	33%	45%	↑
Also Abusing Alcohol	45%	31%	↓
Court / Corrections Referred to Treatment	35%	35%	
Self / Family Referred to Treatment	51%	53%	↑
From Eastern Missouri	70%	76%	↑
Other Admission Characteristics	**1997**	**2011**	
Average Age of First Use (years)	21	21	
Average Time from First Use to First Treatment Admission (years)	11	8	↓

For heroin-related admissions, referrals to treatment have changed little over the past 15 years. Slightly more than half of individuals with heroin addiction are self referred to treatment. Slightly more than one-third of referrals are from the courts and/or corrections. Other sources of referrals to treatment include healthcare providers, schools, mental health and other community agencies.

The average age of first use of heroin is 21 years. This has remained fairly constant over the past 15 years. For those that are also abusing alcohol and/or marijuana in addition to heroin, the average age of first use for the alcohol and marijuana is around 14-15 years of age.

The average number of years from first use to the first treatment admission has declined in recent years but remains large. For first time admissions in 2011, about 8 years separated the first use of heroin and the first admission to treatment—down from 11 years in 1997. This decline may be due to a combination of factors such as increased purity of drugs sold on the streets, increased intervention efforts from family and friends, and/or increased awareness of treatment options.

Sources: [1]National Institute on Drug Abuse (2010). NIDA InfoFacts: Heroin. Retrieved at: http://www.nida.nih.gov/infofacts/heroin.html.
[2]Missouri Division of Alcohol and Drug Abuse (2011). Treatment episode data, 1997 to 2011 [database].

For more information please contact the Division of Alcohol and Drug Abuse at (573)751-4942 or email: adamail@dmh.mo.gov